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ABSTRACT

This paper examines parental involvement, regardless of socioeconomic status and ethnic or racial differences, in a school-university partnership in an elementary school in San Antonio, Texas, where the Alliance School is involved in a partnership with a local Holmes Group university. First described is the history of the school, followed by a literature review of parental involvement when the parents belong to minority and ethnic groups. Next, the program designed to encourage parental involvement at the Alliance School is discussed, including descriptions of ongoing activities after the program's introduction, such as the formation of clubs for the children, various Parent Teacher Association activities, and the role of the Parent Involvement Committee. Parent responses to the program and program beliefs are examined through discussions of the shared values that have been fostered: the centrality of the child; respect for parents; respect for the culture and home life of each child; developing a spirit of love for children as an important aspect of a school; and the concept of sharing. It is noted that the experiences of the school reveal that an inclusive parent involvement program can be built in an inner city school when individuals in the school share a system of values. Contains 16 references. (GLR)

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Through the Eyes of the Beholder: Breaking Economic, Ethnic and Racial Barriers to Parent Involvement In a School-University Partnership

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, California, April 20-24, 1992.

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Introduction

When I started this study, it was to be a simple survey of the parents of so-called at-risk students in a professional development school where parent involvement has been a major focus. As a participant observer who spent a lot of time there, it became increasingly apparent that the positive responses of the parents were based on something more global and substantive than a parent involvement initiative. The school was a safe and comfortable place for adults and children by design. It had a history, its own body of lore, and, most importantly, shared values which were articulated in the small daily actions of everyone who walked through the door. It became just as important to tell the story of the dedication, cooperation and commitment that were the foundation for the survey responses as it was to report them.

History and Literature

The School

The Alliance School is an elementary school which was built thirty years ago to serve a wealthy, suburban, and primarily Anglo-American neighborhood in San Antonio, Texas. As the population of San Antonio grew exponentially in the 70's and early 80's, the area around the school became increasingly commercial as the middle class moved to subdivisions farther from the central loop of the city. The enrollment in the Alliance school decreased so much that the district was forced to close the school in 1985.

In 1988, the school was re-opened after a series of public meetings in which parents voiced concerns about new school boundary changes, classroom environment, busing of children, and student emotional well-being. These concerns were taken into consideration when the school opened and the staff set priorities for the first year.

At that time, a local, private, Holmes Group university formed a partnership with two schools in the school district, the Alliance School, and a high school, and an elementary school and middle school in another school district in San Antonio. The overall goals of the partnership were threefold:

1. The development and implementation of a five year teacher education program;
2. Development and implementation of school-based school improvement initiatives;
3. Provision of a variety of professional development opportunities for inservice teachers and other educators.

The principal of the newly re-opened Alliance School was a graduate of the university in the partnership, with both Bachelors and Masters degrees earned there. She interviewed every staff member who was to teach or work there, carefully selecting teachers and staff members not only for their expertise, but also for their love and concern for children. She specifically sought evidence of a caring attitude in each interviewee. This was an important aspect of setting the climate for the school before it re-opened.

In the intervening three years, while the school was closed, the population of the area had changed dramatically. San Antonio had grown to the tenth largest city in the United States, and had become a large, decentralized urban expanse. The inner loop area around the Alliance School had become part of San Antonio's inner city. Low cost apartment complexes had been built in the neighborhood, housing many low income, single parent, highly mobile families.

The demographics of the Alliance School when it re-opened were more urban than suburban; with 380 pupils, 63% of whom were Hispanic, 33% Anglo, 3% African-American, and 1% other. The second year, the population grew to 474 students, and 311 qualified for free or reduced lunch, with about one-third of the students qualifying for at-risk status in the state of Texas by meeting at least three criteria from a list of risk factors.

The population of the Alliance School has grown each year, and is now at 594 children, 66% of whom are Hispanic, 26%, White, 7% African-American, and 1% other. Two-thirds of the children qualify for free or reduced lunch and one-third are formally classified as at-risk. Since all risk factors are compounded by low economic status (Schorr & Schorr, 1989; Louv, 1990), it is assumed that qualifying for free or reduced lunch in reality has placed two thirds of the children at the Alliance School at risk of low achievement and low success in school. It has also increased the chance that the parents of the students would not readily participate in the activities of the school.

The Literature

Parents from racial, ethnic and cultural minorities, especially those of low socioeconomic status, tend to feel less affinity for the school than those in the mainstream middle class (Litwak & Meyer, 1974). This alienation has emanated from the school's tradition of reproduction of the predominant class structure of American society (Katz, 1975; Ogbu, 1977; Tyack, 1981). Low income, culturally different parents have traditionally been marginalized through an inability to communicate with schools and through the inflexibility of the school as an institution. This tradition has fostered the feelings of inadequacy, failure, and poor self-worth which are cited as reasons for low participation of parents from marginalized groups (Liontos, 1991b). The situation is perpetuated and exacerbated by some parents' inability to communicate with the school due low proficiency in the English language or the economic, emotional and time constraints placed on low SES parents in the daily struggle to survive (Bastion, Fruchter, Gittell, Greer & Haskins, 1986). The staff of the Alliance School experienced these realities from the opening day, and consciously sought to break the cycle of alienation for its parents and students.

The faculty of the Alliance School speaks of its first Open House for parents of the students as a "party to which nobody came." The few parents who arrived were middle class and mostly Anglo: those from environments least discrepant from the traditional

school. They realized that if they were to relate to the parents who were not in attendance, they would have to bridge whatever gap existed between them.

Children who are at-risk are placed in two distinct environments every day: that of the home, and that of the school. They are the students most in need of parent involvement programs because the home and school environments are so different (Liontos, 1991a). If the parents of at-risk children become involved with their children's school, they will be better able to help their children adapt to the differences between the home and school environments. If no involvement exists, there is a good chance that the children will embrace the familiar home culture and reject the unfamiliar school culture (Hamilton-Lee, 1988). For many of the low income, racial and ethnic minority children at the Alliance School, the familiar home culture is likely to be an apartment complex overrun by gangs of adolescents, where drug and alcohol abuse are rampant, and where their parents lack the skills and have little time and energy to help them to succeed in school.

Many of the students at the Alliance School are non-immigrant Mexican Americans and African Americans. Non-immigrant minorities, even though they may highly value education for their children (Ascher & Flaxman, 1985), may have negative associations with schools which could add to feelings of alienation (Lightfoot, 1978). Though they may want a better life for their children, non-immigrant minorities are less likely to "buy the middle class white myth that achievement through education will lead to economic or other benefits" (Ogbu, quoted in Reeves, 1988).

Several studies have shown Mexican Americans to have low rates of parent involvement and high student dropout rates (Cross & Cavazos, 1990). In a study of an ethnically mixed middle school, Anchor and Anchor (1974) found that only 34% of Mexican American parents attended parent conferences regardless of the success or failure of their children.

An additional complication affecting parent involvement exists in Texas, where bilingual education programs come under the aegis of special education. Bilingual programs are housed in schools dispersed throughout the district, and children may be bussed to reach a program. With the stigma of bilingualism being equated with handicapping conditions and the need for remediation added to being bussed out of the neighborhood, many parents fear coming to school speaking Spanish. Many have children who are fluent in both Spanish and English, but are not bilingual themselves.

In one documented case (Herrera & Wooden, 1988), Sara, a mother of four, responded that Spanish was the language most frequently spoken in her home on a Home Language Survey from her child's school. Although her family was fluently bilingual and was competent in English, she had marked Spanish because her own proficiency in English was low. When they were at home, the family spoke Spanish to her because she was self-conscious about her English. As a result of her response, the school placed her son in a

Spanish language instruction class, disregarding his bilingualism. Sara had not been informed that the Home Language Survey would be used for classroom assignment. She was angry and lost trust in the school. Parents have heard many stories like this one, and mark English on their surveys no matter what language is spoken at home.

The Program

The Beginning

The staff met to set goals for the first year and decided that they would make the school an inviting place for the parents to be. They would always be polite and warm and speak to parents at *their* convenience and not at the convenience of the school and staff. If a parent came in unannounced with a concern, the teacher would speak to the parent immediately and set up an appointment for a longer conversation. The staff was involved in the plan. If *any* parent came in or called, the secretaries and other staff were committed to welcoming that person and making them feel at home.

The parents who participated in the early activities became the initial leaders of the parent involvement focus. They read the literature, took part in staff development activities related to parent involvement, and informally encouraged other parents to come to the school. The staff, the parents, and even the children consciously dedicated themselves to the effort to make the school an inviting place for everyone.

Physically, the emphasis was on creating a homey atmosphere, especially in the entrance foyer and office, the first places a parent visits on entering the school. The principal argued with the central office to order a couch and rug for the office rather than the usual waiting room fare. She finally ordered them above the central office protestations. The Alliance School office area is now furnished with a small dining room table, the couch, the rug, a magazine rack, toys for preschool siblings who come in with their parents, plants, and the usual hustle and bustle of any school office. The entrance foyer is filled with student work, a wishing well, a "brag" bulletin board with photographs, and a birthday bulletin board with the names of all students with birthdays in any given month. There are two old fashioned park benches on which a parent and small child are usually sitting, waiting to pick up an older brother or sister or to see the counselor, assistant principal or principal.

The teachers have vowed to create a positive atmosphere which fosters citizenship, cooperation, and high self esteem in the parents and children. They routinely call home to report good behavior as well as good academic performance. They go out of their way to contact parents at convenient times through knowing parents' work schedules and calling them when they are home and not likely to be stressed. They regularly send home postcards regarding children's progress in addition to the regular report card. Each teacher keeps a Parent Involvement Profile in his/her plan book on which he/she keeps track of the involvement of the parents/caregivers of each child throughout the school year. This keeps

the teacher aware of the level of involvement of the parents, and is not used to judge the parent in any way.

The teachers and counselor also publish a newsletter for parents which is sent home every six weeks. In it, they give "Success Strategies," tips on parenting and suggestions for books and family activities. Though there is no bilingual program at the Alliance School and every parent has responded to a "Home Language Survey" as speaking English in the home, all communications that are sent home are in English and Spanish.

The Ongoing Program

By the second year, many ongoing activities had been established. The staff of the Alliance School knew that they would be facing many new parents and children every year and that they must maintain their momentum permanently. They formulated a school mission statement which included the provision of a "nurturing, challenging and well-structured environment which will encourage each individual to achieve his personal best and experience learning as a life-long process." Included in the upper left hand corner as a logo of sorts was Shel Silverstein's star. This was a reminder that in order for a star to keep shining, it had to be polished daily.

It is also a given that the school emphasize achievement and maintain high standards and expectations for each student. In integrating parent involvement initiatives and high expectations, the Resource and Chapter I students publish a newspaper which goes home every six weeks, every student participates in presenting at least one assembly program each year, and an honor roll bulletin board has been added to the foyer.

To improve overall school behavior, several clubs were formed for the children. Manners Matter to Me is a club initiated by the principal. Classes reported displaying the best manners by the cafeteria staff each are awarded coupons and special seating at lunch the following week.

The Pride Club, started by the counselor, is a group of children, two from each class, chosen by each teacher for their good citizenship during a six week period. Pride Club members are awarded badges to wear, and they and their parents are invited to a breakfast celebration. A local grocery store, at which some of the childrens' parents and grandparents work, adopted the school and donates the food and drink needed for the breakfasts, which are held at 7:15 AM, before the school day begins.

In speaking of the Pride Club, the counselor, who is now the assistant principal, related that membership in the club is purposely not based on academics, but on character. The criteria for selection are caring, sharing and supporting others, and teachers are encouraged to select children who might not ordinarily be recognized in school. The breakfasts, hopefully, get parents into the school who might not normally be seen there. In order to make the parents feel more comfortable and free to come in late and leave early, there is no formal presentation at the breakfasts. The atmosphere is intended to be relaxed, with soft

music, informal conversation, and pictures of the children taken for the bulletin board for the club at the local grocery store, where they are displayed.

Each six-week Pride Club performs a community service project. Sample projects are cookies for a residential facility for children located in the neighborhood, and cards for a local nursing home. At the end of the school year, every student who was in the Pride Club during the school year is invited, with his/her parents and/or caregivers to an ice cream social at the school.

More Activities

In order to be more flexible in accommodating working parents' busy schedules, morning gatherings were instituted after much trial and error regarding meeting times. Although regular P.T.A. meetings are held in the evening, there is at least one informal gathering for parents each month. These have such names as Muffins for Mom, Donuts for Dad, and Goodies for Grandparents, and are funded by the P.T.A. Although the names imply that specific people are invited, it is clearly communicated that anyone may come to these early morning functions, to which the whole student body and their "special friends" are invited.

Since most of the children and their parents do not have much money to spend on entertainment, and many are not exposed to cultural and other educational experiences, another program, Design for Living, was instituted. All fifth graders go on a field trip every six weeks to places where they participate in a cultural and enrichment activities. Design for Living field trips include trips to the symphony, the art museum, and a nice restaurant, where the students read the menu and order within budgetary limits. Parents are invited to attend as chaperones and participants.

The partnership high school is down the street from the Alliance Elementary School. As part of a self esteem program, high school students serve as mentors for individual elementary students. The high school mentors invite the parents of their students, who volunteer or are recommended for the program, to a yearly luncheon, which they host, in yet another effort to invite parents to the Alliance School.

P.T.A.

The P.T.A. at the Alliance school won an award last year for the highest increase in enrollment in the region. It's membership and executive committee are racially mixed and reflect the makeup of the school population. It meets once a month, with each grade level providing a program of entertainment for each meeting on a rotating schedule. It provides the funds for many community and school activities and coordinates the Parent Volunteer Program, which is intended to bring parents into the school and involve them in classroom and other school activities. In describing the volunteer program, the P.T.A. Chairperson related, "They come in; they find a niche; and then they stay."

Parent Involvement Committee

The Parent Involvement Committee, which includes parents and teachers, coordinates the considerable number of parent programs in the school. It plans each year for teachers, parents and students in six week units. One recent year had four presentations by faculty members at the partner university, speaking to the teachers on parent involvement, individual differences among students, conferencing with parents, and child advocacy issues.

The Parent Involvement Committee also holds "Make and Take" workshops for parents and children in the early evening. At these workshops, parents and their children participate in an art project or science experiment which they can readily duplicate at home. All teachers attend the "Make and Take" workshops.

Teachers and Staff

A large amount of time is invested by the teachers in involving parents in the school. Since there is no formal art program or full-time art teacher at the school, to supplement art projects in the classroom, teachers started a before-school art club. At these meetings, students study techniques employed by famous artists, something not part of the regular curriculum, and attempt to use those techniques themselves. Parents are welcome to attend art club, if it is convenient for them.

Parent Responses

If there was once a time when parents did not enter the Alliance School, it is not evident now. The commitment to making school an inviting place for them seems to be working.

Last spring, an uncomplicated, open-ended, bilingual questionnaire was sent home to parents of the children in grades one to five at the Alliance School, about 350 parents. One-hundred, thirty seven were returned. Ninety, or 65% were from ethnic minority parents. Their responses are reported here. In the questionnaire, parents were to simply write what about the school made them happy that year, and what did not make them happy.

An overwhelming majority of the parents cited the teacher as what made them happy with the school last year. They wrote testimonies to the dedication of the teachers, the personal attention they gave the students, and the welcoming attitude they had toward parents.

One Latino parent wrote, "I was a chaperone on a field trip (a Design for Living trip) and the next day received a nice note from the kids in the group I had under my supervision. That made me feel good. It also makes me feel good that my own kids are involved in activities that nurture creative talent like plays and such."

The responses in Spanish all focused on academics and the personal attention of the teachers, both for the students and the parents:

> To know that my daughter has the most beautiful teachers giving her confidence and much patience; giving her security within herself in order to continue succeeding in her studies.

> The group of teachers is proficient at teaching a person with little knowledge of the English Language, especially my child's teacher.
> The teacher is very comprehensive with the children and she is very friendly with us.

Responses from ethnic minorities in English also overwhelmingly credited the teachers as being the force behind the invitational climate of the school.

> We love [Alliance Elementary]! Meeting with the teacher for the first time and knowing that my kid has a beautiful, fantastic with children teacher! Fantastic School! The teacher's total dedication to the child, not only their 3 R's, but the knowledge of LIFE - from their own feelings (self esteem) to the needs of others coming first. I don't know if other schools have teachers like this!

Parents appreciated the teachers' attempts to provide a culturally appropriate curriculum. The school celebrated Fiesta, a San Antonio holiday initiated by the League of United Latin-American Citizens, one of the first civil rights groups founded in Texas to promote justice and equality for Hispanics. They held a fiesta parade in the hallways with floats made by the children with anything from shoeboxes to wagons. One parent wrote that she enjoyed her daughter's "learning Latin songs and numbers so her heritage is not forgotten."

The parents mentioned each of the programs, with the Design for Living field trips being the most popular. By far, the most salient aspect of the school which made them feel good about the school was the friendliness and welcoming attitude of the faculty and staff of the Alliance School.

The Principal and the School Counselor

The school counselor initiated many of the programs aimed at involving parents at the school. Though she is currently the school's assistant principal, her successor is continuing the projects and initiating new ones as well. One parent wrote of her:

> I believe the [the counselor] took a very active part in the events she shares with our children. I appreciate the "asthma club," the educational inservices provided by her for the parents], and most of all, the message she got across to the children that she's available to talk with the children anytime, therefore giving a positive connotation associated with "meeting with the counselor." Also the fact that she helps children cope with separation and divorce in the family. I'm sure she helps other children in other ways. These are only a few ways she's helped my family. Thanks!

In an interview, the former counselor explained the philosophy behind her actions:

> I'll do whatever it takes if it's in the best interest of kids. I can't spend my time worrying whether or not I'm breaking the rules or going to suffer repercussions. I'm not going to let a mother with an infant and no car or child care sit at home and miss an A.R.D. meeting. I'll go get her and the baby even if it's against district policy and probably my better judgement. Then, I'll babysit while she's here.

The assistant principal believes that all communications to the home should be in English and in Spanish in San Antonio. As the counselor, she found it necessary to translate the state special education forms to Spanish. Though the only forms that are legal in Texas are those in English, she translated them to Spanish in order to facilitate the parents' answering of them, then translated them back to English for the state.

The principal and the counselor were instrumental in getting the city to run a bus line in front of the school. A new bus stop is nearby. In fact, there have been so many positive changes in an around the school, that a body of lore has evolved around the school and its staff.

Lore

Many parents stated that they had moved into the Alliance School area so that their children could attend the school. They had heard that the principal had hand-picked the staff. The teachers were there because they wanted to be there, and not because they had been transferred there.

Parents had heard that the staff was one of the best in the city and that the school was a safe, secure place for children. This was the school to send your children to if you wanted your child to get a personal, high quality education.

A Latino parent said in an interview:

We went to two other schools. We decided if this one didn't work out, we'd send our children to [a Catholic School] we heard was a very good school. We came, and we have stayed. We love it. The teachers who are here are here because they want to be here. They really care about the kids. They're here no matter what time you come, 7:15 in the morning or 6:00 at night.

The principal figures heavily in the lore. In addition to the story that she hand-picked the staff, many parents mentioned hearing about her positive attitude and welcoming nature before they came to the school. One parent said, "I know that she is the reason the school is this way. Her spirit is in everything here. She has a such a beautiful spirit."

It is interesting to note that the university was not a part of the lore associated with the school. Though the university provided many interns and practicum students for the school, and funded staff development initiatives on parent involvement for the teachers and parents, the community was less aware of the presence and influence of the university in the school than it was aware of the influence of the professional and support staff. The partnership with the university was an integral, but unobtrusive part of the re-opening of the school. It's role was not evident to the public.

The parent involvement program at the Alliance school is a comprehensive, many-faceted effort which requires a huge commitment on the part of the professionals and lay people involved with the school. Though initially the school seems like many other schools, when one digs beneath the surface one may discover the essence of its success.

Institutional Integrity

It takes something I call institutional integrity to create and maintain the kind of atmosphere and inviting manner of this school and its staff. True institutional integrity cuts through barriers of race, class and ethnicity because it is based on universal human values. Belief in the values, however, is not sufficient in the face of bureaucracy and the daily complexities of teaching. The belief must be followed with action. Institutional integrity is

a compact, silent or explicit, to express a set of shared values in day to day activities. The dedication and commitment to shared values must be evident in the actions of all who are involved in the institution.

The integration of each individual into the articulation of the shared values is as important to institutional integrity as the integration of beliefs and actions and the traditional view of individual integrity. The Alliance School exhibits this institutional integrity, the commitment of a group to act as it believes, even in small, everyday, seemingly insignificant activities. Some of their beliefs and examples of action follow.

Shared Values

Centrality of the Child

At the heart of the system of shared values is the centrality of the child. Each child is important to the community of the institution. ("Everyone is here for all of the children. We say a lot that they are the reason why we're here.) The invitational atmosphere is not reserved just for parents. The children feel welcome as well.

Although it has stabilized in the past two years, the population of the Alliance School could be classified as highly mobile, especially the low income, single parent families. A technique was devised so that a child who was new to the school would meet all the key people, people who explicitly share and articulate the values of the school.

Each newly-registered child is given a page of coupons and a badge to wear. The child then goes to every person listed on the page and redeems the coupons while getting the opportunity to meet the people. The principal, secretary, librarian, counselor, nurse, and cafeteria workers introduce themselves, fuss over the child, stress their own availability and willingness to help the child if s/he needs it, and give the child a small present. The intent is for every child to start at the Alliance School with a smile.

Respect for Parents

There were two things that the principal said she looked for in interviewing the teachers and, especially the two people who became counselors in the school. One was a the centrality of the child; the other, respect for parents ("These are their children. What's important to that parent is important to us.")

All members of the professional and non-professional staff believe that respect for every parent should be articulated in action. It is important to the institution that all parents, regardless of their economic status, race or ethnicity, are welcome by everyone from the secretaries to the cafeteria staff to the administration and teachers. In speaking of the school secretary, a very significant member of the culture of any school, the principal stated that she was cheerful and inviting to every parent, no matter how upset or impolite the parent was to her. The secretary makes all visitors feel comfortable in the Alliance School.

Part of respecting parents is recognizing that they have schedules and work hard to support their children, and being flexible and responsive to those schedules. The P.T.A.

went through a period of trial and error seeking beneficial times to hold parent activities. The teachers are aware of the schedules of every parent in their class, and contact them at the convenience of the parent. A Latino working mother, commenting on communication with her child's teacher, said that she arrives home from work at 9:00 in the evening. If the teacher needs to speak with her, she calls then, and not during the day. She made a point of relating that the phone calls were not always negative. She had been called at that time to keep in touch, and with good news as well.

Another way that respect for parents is articulated in action is through helping dysfunctional parents to be better parents to their children. Gloria is an example of such a parent. The mother of two children at the Alliance School, a boy in the first grade, and a girl in the second grade, she has many personal problems. The boy, Peter, is legally blind and has had major surgery on his eyes.

Gloria has a history of substance abuse and leaves her children unattended for periods of time at home. The school has reported her to the authorities on some occasions, after the children have come to school and recounted their experiences. The school has also bought the family food when Gloria reported that her food stamps had been stolen, made appointments with the doctor for her and the children, and provided the transportation to get them there.

The school furnished Gloria and her family with presents for the holidays and gives donated clothing to the children. The principal stated, "Our job is to help her to be a better parent. We're also trying to get her to be able to do these things on her own; trying to help her get her act together."

In out-of-school hours, passing staff members look for the children when they might be playing outdoors to check on their safety and to be sure that Peter is wearing the helmet he requires for play. All staff members, including the liaison university professor and college interns, know that the children have special emotional needs and try to give Peter and his sister extra attention when they see them in the school, thus expanding the community of adults who demonstrate care and concern. This expanded community adds to the institutional integrity of the school.

This parent, though unable to provide a consistent life for her children, and though she suspects that the school personnel have "turned her in" to the authorities, regularly attends P.T.A. meetings and activities. She respects the institutional integrity of the Alliance School and the respect the school has extended to her and her children. She has been invited, has come in, and feels welcome in the school, a goal of the institution.

Respect for the Culture and Home Life of Each Child

The higher, universal value for all aspects of the individual child helps transcend the barriers to parent involvement that adherence to mundane issues might create. It is a foundational value of the institution that the fact that a child speaks a different language in

the home should not impair the ability of the school to communicate with the home. In San Antonio, with the predominant other language being Spanish and the cultural tradition, Hispanic, this barrier is a relatively easy one to break.

Many of the teachers and staff speak Spanish at the Alliance School. Five of the teachers are Latino, and one, African American, but all of the teachers, regardless of their own race or ethnicity, exhibit a dedication to respect the cultures of the children and their parents.

In an interview, one family described their experiences with the Bilingual programs in other schools in San Antonio before coming to the Alliance School. The father recounted that he had been in the military, and met his wife in Mexico. They had two children, and moved from Mexico two years ago. Because the children were from Mexico, they were put in a bilingual program in a school in the same district as the Alliance School. The children were taught 80% of their lessons in Spanish, and the parents were disappointed because their children were not given the chance the learn English.

The family moved away, and when they returned, they purposely moved to the Alliance School area because they had heard so many good things about it. In an interview, the father said, "We went to this school. The kids, they know whether or not they are accepted. We came here, and everyone went out of their way to help them." The mother is a parent volunteer and is often in her childrens' classrooms.

Respect for another's culture is sometimes articulated through acceptance of the differences between the dominant culture and those that differ. This respect for the out-of-school life of the child is demonstrated through flexibility in the interpretation of school rules and a refusal to pass judgement on the basis of the mainstream norms. Several fifth grade male students wear earrings in one ear and/ or have pony tail hair styles. In an interview, one student said that it was his mother's idea to have his ear pierced, but once he got it, he liked it and decided to keep it. He said that no adult in the school had made negative comments about his earring.

A Spirit of Love

Though in the dominant paradigm it is considered too emotional to consider love as an aspect of the culture of a school, it is safe to say that many teachers choose the profession initially because they love children. They may lose sight of this as they become hardened veterans earning a living working in a bureaucratic environment, with families and worries of their own. It becomes more difficult for these veterans to articulate in action one of the key elements of loving behavior, selfless action.

Yet selfless action is evident at the Alliance School every day, in the effort to take children from the residential home for emotionally disturbed children in order to give them an opportunity for a normal school life; in the physical education teacher painting a U.S. flag on the blacktop while the children were learning the names of the states; in the music

teacher, who "went easy" on the second graders when it was their turn to put on the program for the P.T.A. during testing week. The children were rested and under little stress the week of the program. Their needs were placed first.

When asked what it is that makes this school different from the others, the overpowering response from the parents was one word: love. There is a love for children inherent in many of the activities of the school.

The principal, counselor, assistant principal, nurse, and several teachers visit three low rent apartment complexes before school opens for the year. In the "party room" of the complexes, the staff members introduce themselves and describe the school. They inform the parents of the supplies the children will need, and give them some suggestions for helping their children to succeed in school. They do this on their own time, with no recompense, hoping that their efforts will be rewarded not with gratitude, but with higher achievement for their children. This is another example of the articulation of love through selfless action.

In an interview, one parent related that she was a grandparent raising four grandchildren who attend the school. In speaking of the love of the staff for the children, she said that she knew it was a goal of the school to love the kids and that it didn't happen by chance. "Everyone, the faculty, the office staff, everyone has always been friendly and helpful. I wish more schools could catch whatever it is that you folks have going around."

The commitment to loving, selfless action resides in each worker at the Alliance School. Almost every staff member, when faced with the choice between bending regulations or doing something that was not in the best interest of a child, would choose to bend the regulations. Those afraid to take the risk would ask another staff member to support them.

Sharing

The essence of the difference between individual integrity and institutional integrity is in the value for sharing. The adults in the school community freely share themselves, their time, their beliefs and their values through their daily actions with the students and each other.

To the staff of the Alliance School, the school is a close community within the larger surrounding community with whom they share many aspects; but most importantly, love and care for the children. The love and care for the children are also the source of a sense of community within the school. This is best exemplified by the sharing time at faculty meetings for teachers to relate their "kid stories" for the week.

The staff models cooperation in daily interactions in the school. There are team planning sessions, shared materials, and all major decisions at the school are made by consensus. The Parent Involvement Committee shares in the decision-making by helping to formulate the yearly campus plan.

A value for sharing is also evident through the partnership with the university. The teachers knew that this would be a professional development school for the university and that they would be inducting new members into the profession. They view parent involvement as an integral part of the activities of a teacher and share that with their interns. They are dedicated to sharing their attitudes as well as their professional expertise with their interns, thus perpetuating the shared values in a new generation of teachers.

Some Negatives

Although it is difficult to associate integrity with negatives, the institutional integrity of the Alliance School may have a dark side. One of the pitfalls of the strong leadership of the principal in instituting the shared value system is the possible transience of that system. Without her leadership, the integrity of the school could falter. Although she did interview all of the workers at the school, she consciously sought people whose values were consistent with hers. It seems reasonable to assume that since the staff shares those values, they would not allow someone who did not accept those values as their leader. Still, it would probably be difficult for a new leader to maintain the institutional integrity unless the system of shared values was re-defined.

Another possible negative effect of the strong leadership of the principal is that it has, at times, led to feelings of powerlessness among the staff of the Alliance School. Though the teachers have been involved in the decision-making at the school since its inception, at a meeting early this academic year, they expressed a reluctance to pose new ideas to the principal, for fear that they would meet with resistance. The expression of ideas for change to the principal may have become equated with questioning the value system which was the foundation of the school. The strong, almost mythical nature of the tie between the person and the beliefs had attributed more power to the principal than she thought she had.

In an effort to dispel their fears, and in a move toward letting go of some control, the principal invited the staff to offer suggestions to restructure the school. Many meetings were held. Currently, they are in the process of planning to divide the school into three multi-grade family groups as a means of strengthening the sense of community for the children. An upgrading of the curriculum is also planned. Parents are involved in the entire process through communication, informational meetings and input into actual decisions.

Though institutional integrity may emanate from the strong leadership of one person, that person should not be equated with maintaining that integrity. The fact that the values are shared, and that the commitment to action resides within each individual, could negate fears that the integrity of the institution would falter without the leader. Institutional integrity is the sum total of the integrity of the individuals involved in the institution. The dedication of each individual is multiplied considerably through sharing in action, and many barriers to inclusion are broken where institutional integrity exists.

Conclusions

It seems that an effective, inclusive parent involvement program can be built in an inner city school when the individuals in the school share a system of values. This value system, predicated on the belief that *all* children and their parents are important and deserve courteous treatment and inclusion in the process of education, is appropriate for schools with diverse populations which may contain many low income, non-traditional families.

The value system of the Alliance School is effective because it is broad and universal, and centers on the children, for whom all adults of every class and culture desire a better future. The focus on the universal commonality shared by each child, regardless of race or class transcends the usual focus on difference. It also fosters a sense of unity and community rather than a sense of fragmentation. It is flexible and open to change as the needs of the community, the parents, the teachers, the staff, and the children change, yet the broad values apply to many community contexts, and affect the climate in which the values are articulated into action.

The values shared by the adults of the Alliance School community, respect for the children, their parents, and their cultures, sharing and love, would not be as evident and influential as they are without the institutional integrity of the school to carry them out in action. A commitment to the values is not enough. The commitment must be coupled with an awareness of, and dedication to, acting according to the shared values, even when it is inconvenient and there is no pay or recognition.

As "the point and significance of action inheres in the context within which it is undertaken and not in the technical merit of the blueprint drawn up to guide it" (Reid, 1986, p. 160.), it would seem that those seeking effective programs in similar contexts should focus not on the program activities, but on broad values and specific daily individual actions. Many parent involvement programs with activities similar to those described here, fail to achieve the harmony and participation among diverse and disenfranchised groups that the Alliance School has achieved. The integrity of having the climate in the institution clearly reflect the shared values of the individuals has produced a contextual factor that must be addressed in the implementation of parent involvement programs.

The integrity of the institution in which the program takes place influences the degree of inclusiveness of the program. Institutional integrity is the commitment of individuals to shared values and their expression in a specific context. This integrity is an element in parent involvement programs which cut through barriers of race, class and culture, and should be an explicit goal of a program of inclusion.

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